

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** April 12, 2012

**Agenda Item:** Beartooth WMA Grazing Lease Renewal (Polloch Meadows and Upper Cottonwood)

**Division:** Fish & Wildlife, Wildlife Bureau   **Action Needed:** Approval of Final Rule/Action

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

This is a proposal to renew a six-year lease with Sieben Live Stock Company, to graze Pollock Meadows, about 450 acres on the Beartooth WMA. In addition, another 400 acre pasture will be added in the Upper Cottonwood Creek area of the WMA. FWP has had two long-standing grazing leases with Sieben Live Stock on about 5,050 acres of the Beartooth WMA (4,575 and 475 acres). Polloch Meadows is largely composed of smooth brome and timothy, which was planted prior to FWP acquiring the property in 1970. These species are not palatable to elk during most of the year without being grazed periodically by livestock. We intend to use cattle grazing to remove old litter so elk and mule deer will be able to benefit from new re-growth.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The proposed lease extension and new agreement on Upper Cottonwood Creek was available for public comment from Feb. 24 – March 15, 2012. Solicitation of public input resulted in receipt of four comments (three positive, one neutral/negative). Comments were received as one letter and three e-mail responses. These four responses came from two organized groups (Gallatin Wildlife Association and Russell Country Sportsmen Association) with the remainder from two private individuals.

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

#### **1. No action (no grazing lease) alternative:**

- Decadent residual vegetation will remain, and the area will remain unattractive to elk, mule deer, other game and nongame wildlife species.
- Elk will likely use adjacent private land forage in large numbers during the winter and spring time periods.

#### **2. Proposed action (provide grazing lease) alternative:**

- Reduction in decadent residual vegetation, which in turn improves forage conditions and availability for the long term.
- Soil and plant disturbance that will benefit seedling establishment of both desirable and possibly undesirable plant species.
- Provide for better fall and/or spring green-up vegetation for elk, mule deer and other wildlife species, thereby reducing elk usage of adjacent private property during the winter and spring.
- Promote maximum plant production, vigor and nutrient content.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

Approve the six-year grazing lease with Sieben Live Stock. FWP believes the action will increase palatable forage for elk. The system will be monitored to detect negative impacts to native vegetation.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move to renew the six-year livestock grazing lease with Sieben Live Stock on the 450-acre Polloch Meadows portion of the Beartooth WMA and 400 acres in Upper Cottonwood Creek.